

Heartwood Church of England Academy Trust

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Early Years Policy

Policy Owner: EYFS Phase Leaders
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Sign off Signatory: Chair of MAT

Introduction

'Every child deserves the best possible start in life and support to fulfil their potential. A child's experience in the early years has a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right and it provides the foundation for children to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up.' Early Years Foundation Stage Profile - Department for Children, Schools and Families 2012

The Early Years Foundation Stage applies to children from birth to the end of the reception year. At Heartwood Multi Academy Trust (MAT) Primary Schools children are generally admitted to reception in the September following their fourth birthday. Arrangements can be made via the Local Authority to delay the starting age for children born in the Summer (April- August) until the following academic year. At Warton children are admitted to our Nursery from the age of two.

Early childhood is the foundation on which children build the rest of their lives. At Heartwood MAT Primary Schools we greatly value the importance that the EYFS plays in laying secure foundations for future learning and development.

However, we also believe that early childhood is valid in itself as part of life. It is important to view the EYFS as preparation for life and not simply preparation for the next stage of education.

Aims & Objectives

We aim to support all children to become independent and collaborative learners. We will provide a broad and balanced curriculum that will enable each child to develop personally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, physically, creatively and intellectually to their full potential.

At Heartwood MAT Primary Schools, we will:

- Provide a happy, safe, stimulating and challenging programme of learning and development for the children to experience as they begin their journey through school.
- Provide a broad, balanced, relevant and creative curriculum that will set in place firm foundations for further learning and development in Key Stage 1 and beyond and enable choice and decision making, fostering independence and self-confidence.
- Use and value what each child can do, assessing their individual needs and helping each child to progress.
- Develop excellent relationships with parents and carers to build a strong partnership in supporting their children.
- Provide a caring and inclusive learning environment which is sensitive to the requirements of the individual child including those who have additional needs.

The early-years education we offer our children is based on the following principles:

- It builds on what our children already know and can do;
- It ensures that no child is excluded or disadvantaged;
- It offers a structure for learning that has a range of starting points, content that matches the needs of young children, and activities that provide opportunities for learning both indoors and outdoors;
- It provides a rich and stimulating environment;
- It acknowledges the importance of a full working partnership with parents and carers.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is based on four themes:

- A Unique Child
- Positive Relationships
- Enabling Environments
- Learning and Development

A Unique Child

At Heartwood MAT Schools we recognise that every child is a competent learner who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured. We recognise that children develop in individual ways and at varying rates. Children's attitudes and dispositions to learning are influenced by feedback from others; we use praise and encouragement, as well as celebration and rewards, to encourage children to develop a positive attitude to learning.

Inclusion - We value the diversity of individuals within the schools and believe that every child matters. All children at Heartwood MAT Schools are treated fairly regardless of race, gender, religion or abilities. All families are valued within our school.

We give our children every opportunity to achieve their personal best and planning is adapted to meet the needs of all groups and abilities. We do this by taking account of our children's range of life experiences when we are planning for their learning.

At the Foundation Stage we set realistic and challenging expectations keyed to the needs of our children, so that most achieve the Early Learning Goals by the end of the stage. We do this through:

- Planning opportunities that build upon and extend children's knowledge, experience and interests, and develop their self-esteem and confidence;
- Using a wide range of teaching strategies based on children's learning needs;
- Providing a wide range of opportunities to motivate and support children and to help them learn effectively;
- Offering a safe and supportive learning environment in which the contribution of all children is valued;
- Employing resources which reflect diversity and are free from discrimination and stereotyping;
- Planning challenging activities to meet the needs of both boys and girls, of children with special educational needs, of children who are more able, of children with disabilities, of children from all social and cultural backgrounds, of children from different ethnic groups, and of those from diverse linguistic backgrounds;
- Monitoring children's progress and taking action to provide support as necessary (such as referrals to speech therapy) as necessary;
- Working closely with parents, carers and other outside agencies to ensure all children's needs are met and we enable them to access the curriculum and make good progress.

Positive Relationships

At Heartwood MAT Schools we recognise that children learn to be strong, confident and independent from being in secure relationships. We aim to develop caring, respectful, professional relationships with the children and their families.

Parents as Partners - We recognise that parents/carers are children's first and most enduring educators and we value being partners with them in their child's education through:

- Talking to parents/carers before their child starts school or Nursery and providing transition afternoons and induction meetings as appropriate;
- Providing an information pack about commencing Reception at one of the Heartwood MAT schools;
- Outlining the school's expectations in the Home-School agreement;
- Holding a parent consultation early in the academic year to establish how a child is settling into the school environment;
- Operating an 'Open Door' policy for parents/carers with any queries or concerns. Conversely, if EYFS staff have concerns about the progress of a child, they will immediately approach parents and carers to discuss them;
- Written contact through school newsletters and other methods if appropriate (i.e. home-school diary);
- Sending home a range of 'proud cloud' slips designed to enable parents to record achievements;
- Inviting parents to attend informal meetings about areas of the curriculum, such as phonics or reading;
- Sharing regularly the children's 'Learning Journey' with parents/carers and valuing the on-going contributions to this from parents/carers;
- Offering three parent/teacher consultation meetings per year at which their child's progress is discussed;
- Sending a written report on their child's attainment and progress at the end of their time in reception;
- Asking parents to sign a generic permission form for visits, food tasting and photographs etc.
- Parents are invited to a range of activities throughout the school year such as assemblies, workshops, Christmas productions and sports day etc.

Enabling Environments

At Heartwood MAT Schools we recognise that the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending the children's development, where the children feel confident, secure and challenged. The children have daily access to an indoor and outdoor environment that is set up with planned continuous provision.

Play-based learning is paramount and children have opportunities to direct their own learning with planned opportunities provided by staff.

We plan a learning environment, both indoors and outdoors, that encourages a positive attitude to learning and reflects the individual's interests, passions and abilities. We use materials and equipment that reflect both the community that the children come from and the wider world. We encourage the children to make their own selection of the activities on offer, as we believe that this encourages independent learning. We ensure that resources and spaces are safe to use and checked regularly.

Learning and Developing

The EYFS Curriculum – Our curriculum for the Foundation Stage reflects the areas of learning identified in the Early Learning Goals.

There are seven areas of learning and development that must shape educational provision in early years settings. All areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected. None of the areas of learning can be delivered in isolation from the others. Our children's learning experiences enable them to develop competency and skill across a number of learning areas.

They require a balance of adult led and child initiated activities in order for most children to reach the levels required at the end of EYFS. Three areas are particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive.

The three Prime areas are:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Communication and Language
- Physical Development

Staff will also support children in four specific areas, through which the three prime areas are strengthened and applied.

Specific Areas:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the world
- Expressive arts and design

Children's development levels are assessed and as the year progresses, the balance will shift towards a more equal focus on all areas of learning, as children grow in confidence and ability within the three prime areas.

However, if a child's progress in any of the prime areas gives cause for concern, staff will discuss this with the child's parents/carers and agree how to support the child.

Reception pupils also participate in a daily phonics sessions, following the guidance in the "Letters & Sounds" document and in line with school policy.

Characteristics of Effective Learning

We ensure that our environment and delivery of the curriculum incorporates the three characteristics of effective teaching and learning:

- Playing and exploring - children will have opportunities to investigate and experience things, and 'have a go'.
- Active learning - children will have time and space to concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy their achievements.

- Creating and thinking critically - we encourage and support children to have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things.

Children should be given the opportunity to be creative through all areas of learning. Adults can support children's thinking and help them make connections by showing interest, offering encouragement, clarifying ideas and asking open ended questions. Children can access resources and move around the classroom freely and purposefully to extend their learning.

Planning - The Areas of Learning provide the basis for planning throughout the Foundation Stage. The planning objectives within the Foundation Stage are from the Development Matters Statements from the Early Years Foundation Stage document. The planning is based upon themes with discrete phonics, maths and literacy directed teaching. The medium term planning is based upon a different topic with a focus on recognised next steps and children's interests.

Observations - Foundation Stage staff use observations as the basis for planning. Staff are skilled at observing children to identify their achievements, interests and next steps for learning. These observations then lead the direction of the planning. Relevant and significant observations are recorded in the children's Learning Journeys.

Assessment - During the first three weeks in Reception , the teacher assesses the ability of each child using the Developments Matters statements. These assessments allow us to identify patterns of attainment within the cohort, in order to adjust the teaching programme for individual children and groups of children.

The Foundation Stage Profile is the nationally employed assessment tool that enables teachers to record their observations at the end of the Foundation Stage, and to summarise their pupils' progress towards the Early Learning Goals. It covers each of the seven areas of learning contained in the curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage.

We record each child's level of development against the 17 aspects as Beginning, Consolidating or Secure within the Development Matters age-bands. We make regular assessments of children's learning, and we use this information to ensure that future planning reflects identified needs. Tracking grids are updated at the end of each term.

Assessment in the Foundation Stage takes the form of both formal and informal observations, photographic evidence and through planned activities. Assessment is completed regularly and involves both the teacher and other adults, as appropriate. The collection of assessment data in the Foundation Stage Profile is a statutory requirement.

At the end of the final term in Reception we send a summary of these assessments to the LA for analysis. The child's next teacher uses this information to make plans for the year ahead. We share this information too at parental consultation meetings and in the end-of-year report.

Transition

Starting school can be a difficult time for young children; we therefore plan this time carefully to support children with the transition and to ensure it is as smooth as possible for each child and that they settle in to their new class quickly and happily.

Starting Reception – Parents of all children starting in the next academic year will be invited to an Induction Meeting in the summer term to meet their child's new teachers and other key staff and learn more about the Reception curriculum. This is an opportunity for staff to

- To go through the starting school handbook
- Explain about uniform, PE kit and school dinners/ free school meals
- Explain about holidays and absences

New class sessions - The children are given opportunities to come in to school to meet their new class teacher and other children in their class. Parents are encouraged to leave their child during these sessions. This means that before they join their new class the Reception environment is already a familiar place to them.

Arrangements are also made if possible for the children's new class teacher to visit them in their current nursery setting. If this is not possible teachers will make a phone call to their current key worker.

Starting in Key Stage 1 (Year 1) - Throughout the Reception year, each child's involvement in whole school life will have been built upon; many of the teaching and support staff will already be familiar people to them. They will have taken part in whole school collective worship as well as sharing playtimes with the Key Stage 1 children.

Children have the opportunity to meet their new class teacher and spend time in their new class during the summer term.

Safeguarding & Welfare

'Children learn best when they are healthy, safe and secure, when their individual needs are met, and when they have positive relationships with the adults caring for them.'

(Statutory Framework for EYFS 2014)

At Heartwood MAT Schools, we understand that we are legally required to comply with welfare requirements as stated in the Statutory Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage 2014.

- To provide a setting that is welcoming, safe and stimulating where children can grow in confidence;
- Promote good health;
- Manage behaviour effectively in a manner appropriate for the children's stage of development and individual needs;
- To ensure that all adults who look after the children, or who have unsupervised access to them, are suitable to do so;

- Ensure that the setting, furniture and equipment is safe and suitable for the purpose it was intended for;
- Maintain records, policies and procedures required for the safe efficient management of the setting and to meet the needs of the children.

Keeping Safe - It is important to us that all children in the school are 'safe'. We aim to educate children on boundaries, rules and limits and to help them understand why they exist. We provide children with choices to help them develop this important life skill. We encourage children to take risks and highlight the importance of keeping themselves safe by teaching them how to recognise and avoid hazards. We aim to protect the physical and psychological well-being of all children. (See Heartwood MAT Safeguarding Children Policy).

Good Health - All children are provided with a healthy snack each day as well as being given the choice of milk if parents have signed up to the scheme. They have access to water at all times.

Intimate Care – 'Intimate' care is any care which involves washing, touching or carrying out an invasive procedure that most children are able to carry out themselves. However, depending on a child's age and stage of development, they may need some support, for example dressing, wiping their bottom after using the toilet, changing underwear following an accident or for Nursery children changing nappies. (separate policy)

Monitoring and Review

It is the responsibility of those working in Reception to follow the principles stated in this policy. The Head Teacher and EYFS co-ordinator will carry out monitoring on EYFS as part of the whole school monitoring schedule.

This policy will be reviewed in December 2018 or as necessary.